



THE  
CANADIAN VETERANS ADVOCACY

*one veteran, one standard*

January 6, 2012

Minister Steven Blaney  
Deputy Minister Suzanne Tining  
Ombudsman Guy Parent

Good morning,

I am writing in response to a letter I received from Pascal Lacoste and a *Journal de Montréal* article by Christine Bouthillier entitled, "Intoxication à l'uranium: Les demandes du soldat Lacoste refuses," published online at <http://tvanouvelles.ca/lcn/infos/national/archives/2012/01/20120105-075140.html>.

I was disappointed to learn that Pascal's Depleted Uranium (DU) claims have already been denied by Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) and that Minister Blaney's Office suggested Pascal accept the opinions of VAC's experts.

This premature judgment raises serious concerns about the independence of the Scientific Advisory Committee and the motivation for its creation. The public, including Canadian veterans of all eras, believed the Committee was established by Minister Blaney in good faith in response to Pascal's courageous efforts to shine a light on Depleted Uranium and the health issues facing many modern veterans who served in the First Gulf War and in the Balkans.

Pascal was promised that Depleted Uranium would be the first subject addressed by the Scientific Advisory Committee. We were all led to believe that the investigations of the Committee and the forthcoming recommendations of these independent experts would guide VAC in their adjudication of disability claims for veterans like Pascal.

Disabled and terminally ill veterans and their families trusted Minister Blaney when he promised that the Scientific Advisory Committee would investigate and clarify issues related to Depleted Uranium. Veterans were encouraged to believe that the Committee would also look at related issues such as Agent Orange exposure as well as the health implications of exposure to other toxic substances like those to which the crews of the HMCS Kootenay or, more recently, the submarine HMCS Victoria, were exposed.

Given the promises made by Minister Blaney, why has his Office and VAC pre-judged Pascal's claims before the Scientific Advisory Committee even has time to study the issues? How does this live up to the spirit in which the Scientific Advisory Committee and its mandate were established? Will the Committee be nothing more than a political chimera intent on perpetuating the myth that the Harper Government supports our troops and our veterans?

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Or will the Harper Government perform the same charade it did with the New Veterans Charter Advisory Committee? After five long years of work, the Government did little more than pay lip service to the Committee's four hundred specific recommendations, the majority of which could have eased some of the profound physical, mental, and fiscal suffering of Canadian veterans.

Veterans are continually being assured that VAC and the Harper Government have their best interests at heart. Yet time and again, VAC and the Harper Government fail to live up to their promises. Canadian veterans are not children to whom one can make promises and then turn around and break those promises with only a conciliatory pat on the head.

Modern veterans and their families have experienced tremendous anxiety, fear, frustration and anger as a direct result of their service-related health issues. For years these veterans have pleaded for assistance; however their cries for help fell on deaf ears. They have been ignored and belittled by the very Government they served. When Minister Blaney announced the establishment of the Scientific Advisory Committee and its mandate, these veterans were relieved – finally the Government heard their voices and promised to act. Now their hopes for a transparent process and an independent and comprehensive investigation have been shattered. Given recent actions, we no longer trust that VAC will make judgments based on the recommendations of the Scientific Advisory Committee's unbiased assessment. The motives of the Minister of Veterans Affairs Canada and his Department have been blighted by deserved suspicion.

We continually speak of the social contract and the obligation the Government has to its veterans. We have repeatedly tried to engage the Minister in a discussion of this sacred trust. We have served and held fast to the values of honesty, fairness, recognition of the consequences of war and peace, and the lifetime obligation this Government has to its veterans based on patriotic duty, not on budgetary constraints.

Please understand our concerns are sincere and valid. I trust you will take the necessary actions at the highest level to provide a prompt and meaningful response.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Michael L. Blais, CD  
Founder & President

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